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ABSTRACT

Fourth in a series on nonformal education, this manual describes the networking experiences of the Non-Formal Education Information Center (NFEIC) and examines three complementary components: the letter answering services, the publications program, and the resource collection. Types of letters received are outlined, including those requesting extension of services; publications; topical searches for printed resources; inclusion of an item in the NFE Exchange; information on educational/training programs; or topical searches for nonformal education centers, development organizations, and agencies. Procedures for processing incoming publications, selecting and sending publications, and drafting response letters are described. Suggestions are offered on the mechanics of establishing a correspondence system, such as filing correspondence, developing mailing lists, and record keeping and mailing. Discussion of methods for processing incoming mail covers recording, monitoring, and tracking correspondence, as well as collecting data. Specific techniques explained include use of a correspondence log and standard correspondence paragraphs. A rationale for the procedures followed is summarized, and some observations or reflections on NFEIC's experiences are offered. (LMM)

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MANUAL SERIES #4

MAINTAINING AN NFE NETWORK THROUGH CORRESPONDENCE

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March 1984

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FOREWORD

Through its Manual Series, the Non-Formal Education Information Center (NFEIC) seeks to provide a forum for individuals to share their experience in solving particular problems. The publications in this series are designed to be straightforward and practical, bringing a range of experiences in a "how-to" format to those involved in non-formal education and development. This series is not limited to the subjects of non-formal education and development, however. In fact, publications are more likely to address administrative or implementation topics that are important in facilitating non-formal education and development activities.

For a decade the NFEIC has served as a hub in a transnational network of professionals from many disciplines and organizations concerned with the generation and use of knowledge related to non-formal education and development. The Center has earned an international reputation for facilitating this worldwide exchange of knowledge through a series of networking activities. This manual, the fourth in the series, describes the Center's experience in one set of its networking activities -- maintaining a network through correspondence. In a simple fashion it sets out both the underlying principles that govern the Center's correspondence and the procedures the Center's staff have developed to maintain an effective and dynamic network.

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We share our experience with development planners and practitioners in the hope that it might be useful to them in some way. As always, we invite readers' comments and suggestions. Furthermore, we invite potential contributions to the series.

Mary Joy Pigozzi
Director
Non-Formal Education Information Center

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I. MAINTAINING AN NFE NETWORK THROUGH CORRESPONDENCE

A. Introduction

Information basic to the lives of people in circumstances of change is increasingly being recognized as a critical necessity for development work throughout the world. Within the last two decades an enormous amount of data (in the form of reports, evaluations, proposals, and studies) has become available, documenting a vast array of projects and programs. Planners, educators, technical experts, and field workers alike have come to rely on this record of past experience to guide them in their work.

The problem they frequently face, however, is how to obtain what they really need. While they may be aware of the sources and the range of materials available to them, and may even know the specific kind they need, often they do not have the time, or are too distant geographically, to be able to search out and acquire the information for themselves. To search through the great mass of development-related literature on agriculture and land-use in an effort to locate what is relevant to women's farming cooperatives, for instance, may be out of the question for someone who is currently involved in organizing such a cooperative in a village in Southeast Asia. Yet information on similar efforts and experiences in other parts of the world could be of great value.

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The increase in information available to planners and practitioners has been accompanied by the emergence and growth of "information centers". These centers are designed to provide assistance by means of collecting, storing, organizing, and retrieving the data generated by development-related activities.

Increasingly, information centers and individuals concerned about the availability of information are consciously participating in global "networking". Networking activities allow for idea sharing beyond the local or community level across national boundaries. Networking also stretches traditional parameters such as discipline or professional status. The networks that evolve from these activities are loosely knit associations that, for the most part, strive to maintain simple structures and to avoid bureaucratic procedures that hamper and confuse communication. They are made up of free-standing participants who are linked by shared values. The shared values are balanced by a clear recognition of the independence of each participant in the network. Information flow within a network tends to be fluid, it may be bottom-up, top-down, and lateral simultaneously.

One such network that has developed from very modest beginnings in 1974 is the NFE network. Participants in this network live in 145 countries and hold a variety of professional positions. The ideology that is shared in the NFE network is a concern for providing quality non-formal education to the world's poor majority in support of a better life.

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B. The NFE Information Center

The Non-Formal Education Information Center serves as an important link in this growing network of planners, practitioners, and researchers. Housed at Michigan State University, the Center functions as a clearinghouse for resources, conducts research, publishes, and facilitates an exchange of ideas and project information. Primary among the Center's networking activities are the following:

- NFE Resource Collection

  Forming the foundation of the Center's work is the collection of project descriptions and resource materials contributed by participants in the NFE network. The Center's documents collection consists mainly of "fugitive" or inaccessable materials. Most of the 7,000 materials are gifts to the NFE Library in exchange for the Center's publications.

- Research Services

  The NFE Center staff engages in varied program-oriented research. An individualized reference service enables network participants to obtain published and unpublished materials and to learn of others working in similar fields. An average of 80 - 100 such inquiries come to the Center each week, the majority from persons in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

- Publications

  Complementing its other networking activities, the NFE Center's publications program serves as an important communication tool for planners, practitioners, educators, and researchers throughout the world, drawing their attention to new resources and project information and enabling individuals to make direct contact with similarly

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interested others. Along with The NFE Exchange, the Center's publications include a topical annotated bibliography series, an occasional paper series, and a manual series.

C. The NFE Network

Begun in 1974, the Non-Formal Education Information Center currently offers it's resources to a worldwide network now numbering more than 6,000 participants who are regular recipients of the Center's periodical The NFE Exchange. The network participants are scattered throughout the world, residing in 145 different countries and representing a variety of occupations ranging from local community leaders and NFE trainers, to heads of national ministries and government policymakers.

The interests of those in the NFE network are very diverse. But what all appear to have in common is a concern with non-formal or "out-of-school" education and its role in economic, social and political development. Within this general area of concern is an increasingly important focus on women and their participation in the development process.

Those in communication with the NFE Center tend to be actively engaged in a variety of development tasks. In their roles as development intermediaries, these planners, administrators, and educators play key parts in shaping the programs designed to benefit the world's disadvantaged peoples. At the same time, they are often training others to extend this work. As such, they appear to rely on the Center for current and synthesized information on non-formal education

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concepts and practices, as well as for referrals to persons, projects, and print resources.

From its inception the Center has tried to promote an interactive process among members of the NFE network, one that stresses participatory knowledge generation and knowledge exchange rather than knowledge dissemination, per se. The Center maintains contact with many field practitioners who are sharing experiences that reflect years of empirical practice. Likewise, the Center receives information on the work of planners, policymakers, and researchers. Communication with these individuals together with the reports and monographs contributed by them have created within the Center network a unique knowledge base on non-formal education and development.

This manual describes the networking activities of the Non-Formal Education Information Center, focusing on the correspondence system that the Center designed to accomodate and support these activities. As we noted above, there are three basic components to the NFE Center's networking activities. These are the letter answering services, the publications program, and the resource collection. Each of these components overlaps with and complements the others. For instance, the NFE Center resource collection provides the basis for the research upon which the Center's publications depend. This collection also functions as the main resource used by Center staff to respond to requests received in the mail for specialized information. In addition to being a means of providing information assistance to persons who write to the Center, the letter answering services

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operate as a critical communication channel through which current information, documents, and insights on issues and projects in NFE and development are shared with the Center and, ultimately, passed on to others working in related fields in different areas of the world. The publications program, (primarily through The NFE Exchange, and the annotated bibliographies), provides the major mechanism for passing this information on, making it available to a wide, geographically dispersed audience.

We begin our discussion of the Center's correspondence system by outlining the kinds of requests for information assistance received by the Center and procedures for responding to these requests. This is followed by a discussion of the way in which all incoming mail and publications are processed through the Center's system. Part III provides a detailed discussion of the way in which the NFE Center's correspondence system is organized and the rationale behind the procedures that are followed. This section is intended as a guide for readers who may wish to adapt some aspects of the system described to their own needs. In the final section, (Part IV), we present some observations and reflections based on the experiences of the NFE Center.

Throughout the Manual we have tried to illustrate the integrated nature of the Center's activities and to show how this integration provides the supportive framework for effectively maintaining a dynamic international NFE network. For a detailed discussion of the other facets of the Center's work - the publications program, and

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the management of the NFE resource collection - we refer readers to earlier manuals in this series: #1 A Simple Guide to Managing A Resource Center on Non-Formal Education for Development by Anne L. Mason, Lynn Schlueter and the staff of the Non-Formal Education Information Center; #2 Preparing Citations and Annotations by the staff of the Non-Formal Education Information Center; and #3 Preparing and Producing The NFE Exchange by Milla McLachlan, Lynn Schlueter, Earl Brigham and the staff of the Non-Formal Education Information Center.

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PART II - RESPONDING TO THE MAIL

In this section we describe the process by which the NFE Center responds to the varied range of requests for information assistance received daily in the mail. While the majority of this discussion will focus on the nature of the requests themselves and the way in which the Center staff make decisions regarding the most appropriate response for each inquiry, some preliminary comments need to be made about the initial procedures the Center follows for processing incoming mail. Because the Center receives a large volume of mail on a continual basis, it is essential that an organized set of procedures for handling incoming mail be followed consistently, regardless of the number of staff who may be working with the correspondence at any given time. A more detailed overview of the correspondence system and the rationale for the procedures is presented in a later section.

Incoming mail is always opened on the day it is received. After opening, each letter is stamped with the current date and immediately listed on a log sheet. Logging-in each letter provides us with a record of receipt for each piece of mail and decreases the possibility of letters getting lost or misplaced. The log sheet also serves a number of other important record-keeping functions for the Center and will be discussed in greater detail in a later section of this manual. The information recorded on the log sheet at this time includes the name of the sender, the name of the affiliated organization or agency (if applicable), the country from which the letter originated,

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the geographic regional designation (i.e. Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America, Europe), and the date the Center received the letter. (Part III contains an example of the log sheet used by the NFE Center.) Other parts of the log sheet will be filled in later when the response to the letter is drafted and typed.

Once this initial information is recorded, the Center correspondence files are searched for any previous communication the Center may have had with the individual or the organization sending the letter. If previous correspondence exists, that particular file is attached to the current letter. This enables the staff member who drafts the response to quickly check through the correspondence history and, depending on the nature of the current request, make decisions regarding an appropriate response based on previous communication. This is particularly important if the response includes sending Center publications in that one can find out at a glance which publications the individual making the request may have already received, and in this way avoid duplication. Incoming publications and exchange materials contributed to the NFE Center Library are handled according to these same procedures, regardless of whether or not a letter accompanies them.

As soon as all the letters and publications received have been recorded on the log sheets and any previous correspondence has been attached to each piece of mail, the letters are then bundled together into packets with the appropriate log sheet on top. (Each log sheet

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has space for approximately eight entries, so each packet holds eight pieces of mail or less.) At this point the entire packet or packets are passed on to the staff member who will be drafting responses to the letters.

The procedures described above are supported by two important policies which are fundamental to the service orientation of the NFE Center. First, every letter that comes into the Center receives an individualized response. Even if we forward a particular request elsewhere, we write to the person making the request to inform them of the action we have taken. This reinforces the personal quality that characterizes the NFE network and further encourages network participants to continue to communicate directly with us and with others in the network. Second, no more than one week should go by between the receipt of a letter and the mailing out of our response. This policy takes into account the fact that most of the mail that we receive comes from overseas and has likely been "in transit" for some time already. If it takes a letter two weeks to reach our Center and another two weeks for our response to reach its destination, it becomes particularly important that we respond to each inquiry as promptly as possible.

A. LETTERS RECEIVED

The NFE Center receives approximately 80 - 100 letters a week from network participants around the world. People write to the

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Center for a variety of reasons, and the diversity of interests represented in the NFE network is reflected in the kinds of requests the Center receives. While the specific details of each letter may vary, we have found it useful to establish several categories into which the majority of letters tend to fall. Most frequently, the Center receives requests for information resources on specialized topics, often with a regional focus; referral listings of other organizations or agencies which may be involved in projects similar to that of the writer; and publications, such as The NFE Exchange, produced by the NFE Center. In addition, the Center continues to receive an increasing number of inquiries about educational training opportunities, and university-based degree programs which provide a topical focus or specialization in non-formal education and development. Because the NFE Center provides an individual response to each inquiry it receives, the process for answering the mail requires the staff members to make a series of judgements regarding the type of request and how best to respond to it. Thus, the general categories of requests mentioned above serve as a framework in which such judgements can be made. Furthermore, they also provide a consistent set of guidelines for handling requests so that several staff members can process the letters promptly and efficiently. It should be noted that the categories reflect the types of requests we receive most frequently. In this sense

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they remain useful to us only so long as we continue to receive the volume of requests that can be appropriately handled by this system. Should we begin to receive other kinds of requests in a significant number we would then alter our system of categories to accomodate the new type of request.

On the following pages we provide a brief description of each of the request categories currently used at the NFE Center, and the procedures followed by staff in handling requests in each category.

i. Types of Requests

• *Extend Services (E).* This category of requests covers inquiries regarding the services offered by the NFE Information Center. For the most part, these letters are general in content and of an introductory nature. An individual may have heard about the NEF Center from another source and is writing to find out more about the resources and services that are available and the range of activities in which the Center is involved. Frequently these inquiries include a request to be placed on the mailing list to receive The NFE Exchange. A listing of the Center's other publications may also be requested.

In response to these inquiries we will send a letter to the individual which provides a general introduction to the Center and its services along with a brochure giving further details on Center activities. If we are placing the person's name on the mailing list

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for The NFE Exchange, the letter will indicate that a copy of the most recent issues, or several issues, of the newsletter are being sent under separate cover. The decision to send additional issues of our newsletter, and the selection of which particular issues will be sent depends upon any indications the letter may contain concerning the topical interests or the type of work in which the person writing to us is engaged. For example, we may receive a letter from someone requesting that their name be placed on the mailing list who may state in the letter that he or she is currently working on a literacy project for village farmers, or a skills training program for rural women. In such cases, we would include previous issues of The NFE Exchange which may topically address the areas of literacy, agriculture, income generation, and women.

Most of the inquiries that fall into this category are usually from people who have not had any previous direct contact with the NFE Center, and are therefore counted as initial communications. However, the Center also receives a large number of letters from persons who are already in communication with the Center or may be on the mailing list who request that we place a friend's or colleague's name on the mailing list. These letters are coded with an "ES" rather than an "E", to indicate the third party nature of the request (i.e. that the person making the request is not the person who will receive the information). If the request is on behalf of

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more than one person, a number will follow the ES code showing how many people will receive our response.

Requests made on behalf of a third party are handled in a manner similar to what we have described for the first-time inquiries. The person for whom the request is being made will receive a letter introducing the Center and its services and stating that an issue or issues of The NFE Exchange will be sent under separate cover. The letter will also note the name of the person who made the request on their behalf. In addition, we also write a letter to the person who wrote to us making the request and include a copy of the letter we sent to the individual in whose name the request was made. This procedure serves to acknowledge the communication from a network participant and at the same time confirms that the third party will be receiving the information requested.

• *Request for Publications (P).* This category includes requests for publications produced by the NFE Information Center. These inquiries tend to be more specific in that actual titles are designated by the person writing the letter, (for instance, the request may be for a copy of a particular issue or issues of The NFE Exchange, or for one of the Annotated Bibliographies or Occasional Papers). Thus the response can be fairly uniform.

When an individual writes to the Center indicating a publication

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he or she is interested in receiving, we will send a letter stating that their request is being processed and that the publication or publications will be sent to them under separate cover. Writing a letter rather than just forwarding the requested material enables us to have a record of the fact that each request for Center publications has been processed and the date it was sent. This record also allows us to keep track of the number of requests we receive for particular publications.

• *Topical Search for Printed Resources (TSPR).* This category includes requests for topically or regionally focused print materials. Rarely do the persons making the request cite titles, rather, they tend to describe what they're doing and ask that we identify titles that might be appropriate to their work.

These requests can be handled in several ways. In cases where an individual seeks information on a general topical range (such as women in development, literacy, nutrition, agriculture, or health) we can usually respond by sending appropriate titles from our Annotated Bibliography series, and previous issues of The NFE Exchange which contain topically relevant resource listings. In other cases, where the request is more specific (such as a listing of NFE projects which make use of radio for village health education in the Pacific region) we will conduct a special search in our

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resource library for current relevant titles and compile a listing specifically for the particular request. A copy of all of these special listings are kept on file in the Center so that if we get similar requests in the future we can draw on already prepared materials.

All requests in this category require that a degree of judgement be exercised by staff as to the nature of the request and the context of the person making the request. For instance, a request from someone who is in charge of building a resource collection of materials on non-formal education and literacy would be handled differently from a request for information from a field worker involved in teaching literacy to a rural farming population. In the former case, the person is in a position to identify and procure appropriate titles and in order to do so, he or she needs to first find out what is available. Thus, sending an extensive annotated bibilography (such as our AB# 3 on literacy and basic education) which lists and describes a range of print materials on NFE and literacy from around the world would be a appropriate response. In the latter case, however, where the individual may not have the time to sift through such a comprehesive listing of materials, it may be more appropriate instead to send a shorter more focused listing- perhaps on "literacy training for farmers" - and perhaps also focused on the region of the world in which the individual is working. In

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addition we might provide addresses of other organizations and agencies which have been involved in similar projects so that the individual making the request can make direct contact with others with whom to share experiences, knowledge, and expertise.

In both of these cases the decision on how to respond and what to send is made on an individual basis by a staff member who considers not only the stated request, but also the context in which the information requested would be used. Clearly, this category of request is the most complex and time consuming of all the inquiries received by the Center. But the feedback and comments we continue to receive from persons for whom we have compiled such specialized listings suggests that the individualized attention these requests receive is highly valued.

• *Include Item in The NFE Exchange (IIE).* The Center frequently receives letters from persons who request that we bring their work, or the work of their colleagues, to the attention of readers of The NFE Exchange. This category of requests covers such things as descriptions of new publications on non-formal education and development, summaries of current projects and organization activities, announcements of training opportunities or upcoming workshops and conferences. Depending on the relevance and nature of the request, we will send a letter stating whether or not we will

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include the item in The NFE Exchange, and indicating a time frame with regard to when the description or announcement might occur.

Reviewing our publications plans, we may try to include project descriptions in an issue of The NFE Exchange that would be topically most relevant. Other items, such as announcements of workshops, training programs, or available publications would be included in the "Network News" section of a forthcoming issue. In all cases, copies of requests in this category will be placed in a separate file which we refer to as we design each issue of The NFE Exchange. (For a more detailed discussion of how this request category relates to the publication process of our newsletters we refer readers to Manual # 3 Preparing and Producing The NFE Exchange by Milla McLachlin, Lynn Schlueter, Earl Brigham and the staff of the Non-Formal Education Information Center.)

• *Requests regarding Educational/Training Programs (ETP).* This category includes letters we receive from persons who are seeking information about educational programs with an academic department here at Michigan State University, generally leading to an advanced degree; or topically focused short courses offered at various times during the year. Such requests are handled by forwarding the letter to the particular department and faculty in which the writer is interested. When no department is specified, for instance when

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someone writes for general information on what kinds of programs might be offered, their letter is often forwarded to several departments and administrative units which can provide general information relevant to the persons range of interests. While we forward these requests to others we also respond to the individual explaining that we have done so and listing the name and university address of each person or department the letter was forwarded to to. This enables the person to make a direct inquiry to the different academic units should they wish to do so. When we forward a copy of the request to others we also include a copy of our response to the individual who made the request. When a person also specifies an interest in educational programs elsewhere in the U.S., we try to include a select list of other universities which may have programs of interest so the individual can contact them directly.

Along with requests for information on degree-earning educational programs, the Center also receives inquiries about short term training workshops offered by the NFE Center. As the Center's training workshops are always offered on the basis of individual requests, we respond to such inquiries by encouraging persons interested in training to provide us with further details on their own interests and needs and the kind of training they might have in mind. Our response always includes a brief summary of the topical

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range of previous training workshops conducted by the Center, and a general outline of the kinds of costs that would be involved.

• *Topical Search for Other NFE Centers, Development Organizations and Agencies (TSNC).* Frequently the NFE Center receives letters from persons who wish to locate organizations, agencies, and other individuals who may be involved in similar activities and projects. Often these requests specify a particular geographic region or country. For instance, a person may write to us requesting names and addresses of organizations and persons involved in village-level nutrition education projects in the Pacific region. In response to such an inquiry, a staff member will compile a select listing of names and addresses of organizations and individuals relevant to the topical and geographic focus specified in the letter. The individual making the request would then receive a letter from the Center and a brief listing of addresses he or she may wish to contact. Because of the value the NFE Center places on direct communication between network participants, such requests are never forwarded to organizations, rather we provide information that will enable individuals to pursue such contact independently and directly.

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ii. Rationale for Recording This Information

Each of the categories described above has a code (usually formed by the initials, such as TSPR for "topical search for print resources") which is used when recording information about each request on the log sheet. There are two primary reasons for why we keep such records on the correspondence we receive.

First, recording information on the kinds of requests we receive provides the Center with an ongoing and current gauge for trends and priorities in non-formal education and development through-out the world. Knowing what topical areas and issues are of interest to persons involved in NFE is critical to the Center's ability to provide relevant information assistance and useful publications. Knowledge of what is going on in the field is particularly important in the planning and production of each issue of The NFE Exchange. Here again we stress the integrative nature of the NFE Center's work. Our sense of what is an important topical area, or set of issues, is drawn primarily from the contact we have with network participants, both through the letters we receive as well as the kinds of documents and publications people send to us in exchange for our services. By keeping a systematic record of topical interests expressed in correspondence, and by recording the subject areas for each publication contributed to the NFE Center resource collection, we are able to note new interests and, to some degree, anticipate new information needs as they occur.

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The second reason for keeping track of this information has to do with the data needed for the Center's annual reports. Along with reporting on the overall range of Center activities, each annual report includes a summary and brief assessment of the amount and kinds of correspondence received and processed over the course of a year. Most of the data required for this portion of the annual report is already collected on the log sheets and thus only needs to be tabulated and analyzed. In this way, the log sheets function as a record-keeping device which ultimately saves a great deal of staff time and energy.

B. PUBLICATIONS

Along with letters, the NFE Center receives a large number of documents and publications. Most of these materials are contributions made to the NFE resource collection by network participants in exchange for information services or Center publications. The NFE Center library has been built primarily through the "exchange principle" -- active participants in the international NFE network share with us reports, surveys, and descriptions of out-of-school educational and development-related activities in which they or their colleagues are involved, in exchange for our publications. The Center's exchange policy is an integral part of the overall operation of the Center and is fundamental to the philosophy upon which the Center's services are based. For many people in the NFE network the exchange policy clearly means the difference between being able to access and obtain needed information and lacking that access altogether. Given

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scarce financial resources, as well as the often stringent constraints against obtaining foreign currency experienced by many involved in NFE in developing countries, the absence of such an alternative form of "payment" would virtually exclude a vast portion of the NFE network from tapping into the resources made available by the Center.

While the Center's exchange policy has obvious advantages for recipients of the Center's services, the advantages this policy has for the Center itself are also very important. Being on the receiving end of print contributions from network participants provides the Center with a constant in-flow of current research data, project reports, and fresh ideas from practitioners, planners, educators, and researchers working in a vast array of NFE activities worldwide. This is what forms the Center's resource base and enables the Center to continue to provide relevant and up-to-date information services, as well as providing part of the basis for its publications program. And, along with the letters that come into the Center, this ongoing flow of documents continues to inform the Center on issues and trends from the perspectives of those most directly involved in non-formal education.

In the previous section we described the range of requests for information assistance received by the Center and the manner in which each type of request is responded to. In this section we outline the procedures followed for processing incoming publications and for selecting and sending NFE Center publications on exchange.

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i. Incoming Publications

Because the NFE Center has a large resource collection and plays an important role as part of an exchange network, many documents pass through the Center. As a result, we have found it necessary to develop procedures for processing both incoming and outgoing materials.

In addition to books, articles, and periodicals, many other materials, such as project and organization descriptions and accessions lists, are considered as incoming publications. The Center has a simple but detailed recording system and processing procedure that has proved useful for assisting the coordination and reporting of the Center's correspondence activities.

As with all of the Center's incoming mail, we have found it useful to keep the envelope attached to the publication as a means to help determine what kind of acknowledgement should be sent to the individual or organization who has contributed the document to the Center. (Once this decision has been made, the envelope can be disposed of.) Books, articles, initial copies of periodicals, and other incoming materials are recorded by number (amount), topic, and correspondent on the correspondence log (see page 59, last column, and page 57, for a list of general topics used for publications). Periodicals that we receive regularly are just totalled each day and noted at the bottom of the log sheet. Among the advantages of this careful recording system is that we can easily identify how many

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materials we receive over a given period of time. For instance, we can tell in November 1983 we received 18 publications on women in development, and 14 on literacy.

Almost all materials given to the Center are acknowledged either by letter or by an acknowledgement card. As we operate on the exchange principle and individuals are sharing materials with us at some cost to them or their organization, a prompt and courteous acknowledgement is an important operating policy of the Center.

• *General Procedures*. Every acknowledgement (card or letter) for a publication we receive has two flimsy (carbon) copies. One of the copies goes into the correspondence files, the second copy is added to the library acquisitions file. Rather than have a separate accessions list developed, the Coordinator of Documentation files flimsy carbons chronologically by date of acknowledgement. This serves a number of useful purposes: as an accessions list; as a place in which the Coordinator of Documentation can note where newly received but still uncatalogued materials have been placed (so that materials can be shared with a staff member who may need them for a specific and immediate task); and as a source that can be used by research editors of The NFE Exchange to identify new acquisitions to be noted in the newsletter.

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The decision of whether to send an acknowledgement card or a letter is based on a general Center policy to make an effort to maintain individualized contact with active participants in the exchange network, (be they persons or organizations), whenever possible. For the most part then, we will write a letter of acknowledgement to those who send us publications. The personal nature of a letter provides us with an opportunity to express our appreciation and recognize the generosity of the contribution. It also enables us to demonstrate that, in fact, every contribution made to the Center's resource collection is noted with interest and not merely filed away in the Library. We consider this kind of individualized and personal contact fundamental to sustaining the unique quality of the international NFE network.

• *Books and Other Documents*. Most of these materials are acknowledged in a letter which includes the full title(s) and author(s) and comments briefly on the materials' content and utility. Any document that we have requested automatically receives a letter of acknowledgement. Documents not accompanied by a letter and without any evidence of being sent by a specific individual are usually acknowledged with an acknowledgement card (see following page). Again, with full title(s) and author(s) listed. However, in some cases even these documents warrant a letter of acknowledgement. For instance, if a publication is particularly useful and we wish to share our thoughts on it with the publishing organization or if we would like to receive additional copies for specific purposes.

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Director, Non-Formal Education Information Center
College of Education
237 Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824

Unesco Regional Office for Education
in Asia and Oceania
G.P.O. Box 1425
Bangkok
THAILAND

We gratefully acknowledge receipt of the publications:
Le acusamos con gratitud el recibo de:
Agreez nos remerciements pour l'envoi de:
Wir bestatigen mit bestem dank den empfang der obigan Schriff:

Non-Formal Education Strategies and Management
by W. P. Napitupulu

(signature)
Director, Non-Formal Education Information center

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• *Periodicals.* Periodicals that come to the Center regularly are not acknowledged. However, we do keep a daily count on the correspondence log of incoming periodicals. All new periodicals should be acknowledged and noted on the correspondence log as regular incoming mail. The acknowledgement for these varies with the content of the periodical. For example, if we have requested it we would acknowledge it with a letter; if necessary clarify that it is received on an exchange basis, and add the person/organization to the mailing list if they are not already on (it may be necessary to check this with the correspondence records). If any issue of a periodical is sent to us for review (i.e. we have not requested it), we would write a letter of response either indicating that we would like to receive it regularly on an exchange basis (sending a copy of The NFE Exchange) and asking if they wish to be added to our mailing list; or, indicating that, though it is a valuable publication, it is not closely related to our work. In this case we would offer the general services of the Center and, if possible, refer the organization to others who might be interested.

Many items that come to the Center through the University's internal mail, that are primarily informational items, need not be acknowledged. Brochures and flyers that advertise new publications or announce activities not closely related to our work frequently need not be acknowledged. Occasionally, when we receive announcements for upcoming conferences in topical areas not directly related to our work, we will send a letter stating that we will distribute or post this information so that others who may be interested can benefit from it.

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• *Processing Incoming Publications*. Our experience has shown that careful scrutiny of all incoming materials often results in high benefits to our work. Almost all materials donated to the Center become part of the NFE resource collection; that is, they are forwarded to the Coordinator of Documentation sc the materials may be catalogued and added to the Library collection (See Manual Series #1, A Simple Guide to Managing a Resource Center on Non-Formal Education for Development).

We have also found it useful to identify some documents when they arrive at the Center to ensure that staff members who are working on specific tasks see the new materials as soon as possible. For example, if a member of the research staff is preparing a special request (see page 22) on evaluation, newly received materials on evaluation would be brought to that person's attention. As we have an ongoing procedure for building on our system of bibliographies, materials of relevance to any of the topics are noted and the citations added to the system before the materials are catalogued. As other projects or interests are identified as part of the Center's scope of work, different materials can be directed to appropriate staff.

ii. Selecting and Sending Publications

As we noted earlier in this section, most of the documents and publications received by the NFE Center are materials sent by network participants in exchange for the Center's own publications (such as annotated bibliographies, topical bibliographic listings,

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occasional papers, manuals, and The NFE Exchange). Many times, those who sent documents to the Center may also specify particular Center publications they would like to receive on exchange. For example, a person involved in a nutrition education project for village women in rural Thailand might send to the Center several recent reports or project descriptions and also indicate an interest in receiving our annotated bibliographies on women in development (AB#1) and non-formal education and nutrition (AB#9) in exchange. In such instances we provide the titles requested. Frequently, however, no title is specified, and in these cases the decision regarding what to send in exchange would be made by NFE Center staff.

Selecting exchange publications to send to persons who have contributed materials to the Center involves judgments similar to those made in responding to the mail. For the most part, we try to make sure that Center materials sent on exchange are topically relevant and appropriate to the interests and activities of the recipient. For persons who have contributed copies of their publications to the Center in the past, we are careful to select items that have not already been sent to them. This is done by checking the individual's correspondence file and mailing list card (if one exists), either of which will indicate the titles of Center publications previously sent on exchange. This double-checking of our own records is important in that it guards against sending duplicate copies of our publications and it also ensures that people who share their publications with the Center on a fairly regular basis will be receiving our most current materials in return.

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C. DRAFTING LETTERS

After the mail has been opened, dated, logged in, and the files searched, the person or persons who will be writing responses to the letters will receive several logs, each containing eight letters and, if previous correspondence exists, the relevant file will be attached to each letter. When letters are being answered it is important that they be kept with the appropriate log sheet and that they remain in the order in which they appear on the log sheet. This is important because the processing of incoming correspondence involves several steps and each step may involve a different staff member. While the mail is being processed, the log sheets provide the only organized record of letters received. In order to make sure that nothing is misplaced or lost along the way, and that each letter is processed correctly, it is critical that the organization provided by the log sheet is maintained by all who handle the mail.

Once decisions have been made about the nature of a particular inquiry and how to handle it, the response is drafted. In the actual drafting of letters a fairly routine procedure is followed. The person writing the response indicates in the letter the action taken by the NFE Center regarding the request, and lists titles of any Center publications or reference materials that will be sent under separate cover. Given the large volume of mail received by the Center on a weekly basis, along with the Center's commitment to responding to each request within one week, it is critical that procedures for answering the mail be as efficient as possible. There are two related procedures in the Center's

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system for responding to requests which contribute to the efficient processing of mail. The first is the use of several general "request categories" which reflect the most frequent types of requests the Center receives. We have already discussed at some length the specific request categories currently in use at the NFE Center, as well as how requests in each of the categories are handled (see Part II, section A). Designating such categories for requests is a useful way of determining the kind of response needed, in that there are certain established patterns for responding to requests in the various categories.

The second procedure involves the use of a series of standardized paragraphs which the Center has designed specifically for responding to letters which fall into these request categories. A more detailed discussion of the use and the advantages of these paragraphs is contained in Part III (see page 60). What we would like to emphasize here is that by using both the request categories and the standardized paragraphs, when appropriate, the amount of staff time spent drafting individual responses to letters is greatly decreased. Thus, more time can be focused on researching the often complex specialized request for information assistance and referrals received by the Center. An additional advantage is the quality of consistency the standardized set of paragraphs and the designated request categories give the Center's overall letter answering services. This is particularly important if several staff members are answering letters simultaneously. Each would be working with the same set of guidelines, using the same set of paragraphs, and this would allow the letters, written by different people, to maintain a consistent "tone".

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When responses have been drafted for all the letters contained in a log, the entire log is then passed to the Center Director who reviews both the letters received by the Center and the letters drafted in response to these requests. In addition to ensuring that the Director sees all letters that come to the Center, this procedure also provides a system of double-checking to make sure the response addresses the request in the most appropriate way, and that consistency in responding to inquiries is maintained. If changes in the draft are needed, or if additional items of information should be included, the draft is passed back to the individual responsible for writing that particular response so that the revision can be made. After reading through the letters, the Director then passes the correspondence log or logs to the Center Secretary who will type the letters and pass them back to the appropriate individual for proofing and signing.

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III. SETTING UP A CORRESPONDENCE SYSTEM

In the previous section we described various ways in which the NFE Center maintains and facilitates an international NFE network through correspondence. We highlighted the kinds of requests received and the judgements made to ascertain the most appropriate means of response. We also outlined the procedures followed by Center staff for processing and responding to requests, as well as those for handling incoming publications. Finally, we discussed the process for drafting and sending out letters.

Throughout this description we have tried to portray the integrative nature of all of the Center's activities, indicating points at which, for instance, the individualized letter-answering service overlaps with the publications program, or the way in which network participants in contact with the Center influence the substantive directions the Center moves in.

In this section we address some of the mechanics of managing a network through correspondence. Drawing on our own experience, we outline ways to set up a similar system keeping in mind the range of goals and needs such a system might serve. This section, then, is designed as a guide to provide suggestions to those who are involved in managing a network or who are in the process of building a network.

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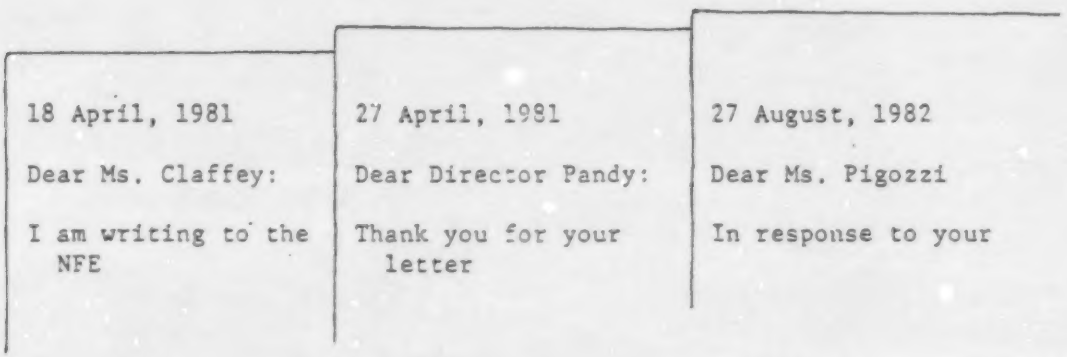
A. FILING CORRESPONDENCE

Our experience has shown that it is important to have correspondence organized in a way that makes it possible for us to find particular letters easily. There are several reasons why we need to access letters. These include:

- to find out if we have received earlier correspondence from the person writing to us
- to see if we have already written or sent materials to the person
- to verify whether we are already in touch with other individuals from the same organization.

There are several very different ways that correspondence files may be arranged. Though many organizations file their letters chronologically (that is, by date of receipt) the NFE Center has found it best to organize these files alphabetically by last name, with the most recent piece of correspondence on top. Thus an individual's correspondence file might look like this:



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Correspondence to and from the same individual is kept together so that:

- upon receipt of a letter from that person we can easily find all previous correspondence.
- center staff can quickly review past communications so as to get a sense of the history of the interactions that have occurred.
- there is available, at a glance, a summary of publications sent to, and received from, that person.

As has been noted earlier, correspondence is organized alphabetically by the last name. We recognize that the last in a series of names is not necessarily the family name, but adhering to this rule means that correspondence is filed consistently from day to day and from year to year. To give an example, in the illustration below the names of the people on the left hand side are re-ordered on the right hand side according to the Center's filing system:

Dr. Ray SanGiovanni	Guzman, Felipe de
Dr. Felipe de Guzman	Hauzeur, Rene
Mrs. Maria LaoSunthara	Hoxeng, James
Ms. Nicole Vial	LaoSunthara, Maria
Sr. Rene Hauzeur	Reyes, Socorro Camacho
Dr. Obdulia Sison	SanGiovanni, Ray
Mr. James Hoxeng	Sison, Obdulia
Ma. Socorro Camacho-Reyes	Vial, Nicole

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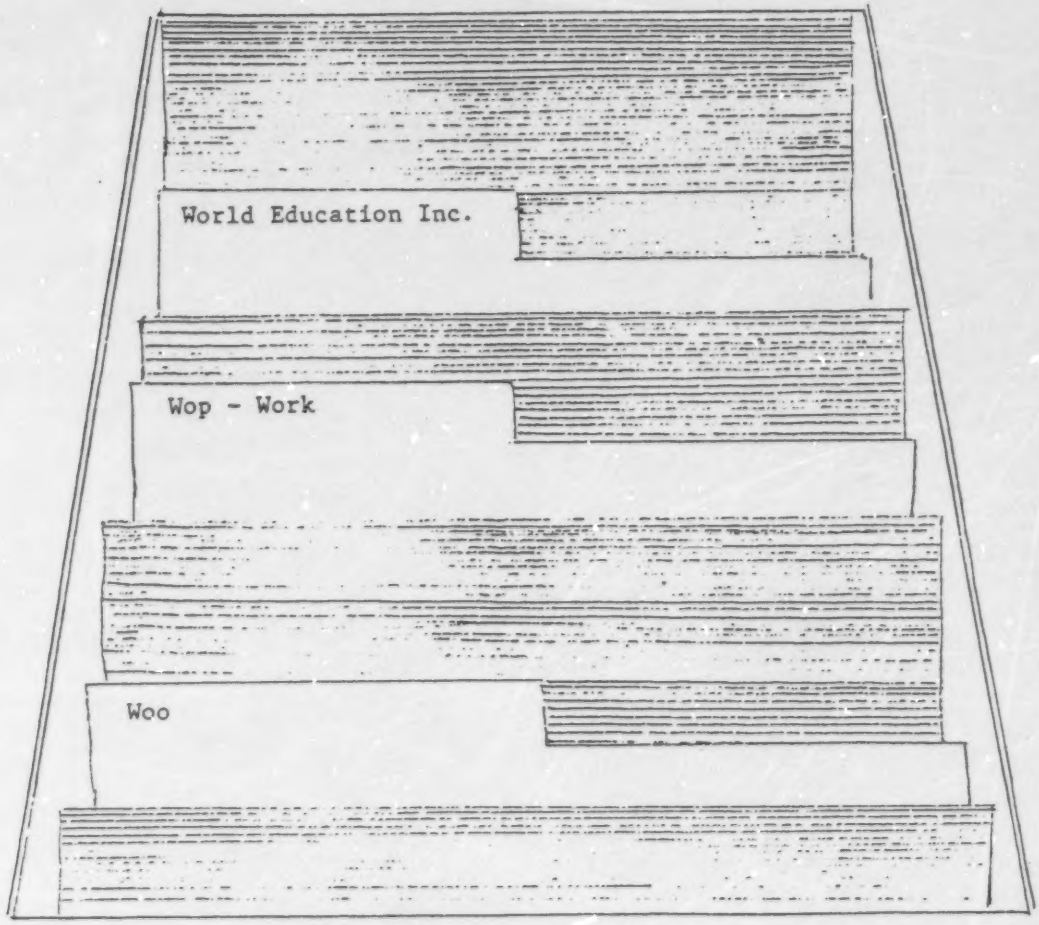
Correspondence is kept in manila folders that are carefully marked to show what correspondence they contain. As an example the tops of three consecutive manila folders from our files appear below.



Because the center's correspondence is kept in manila folders in file drawers, we have found it necessary to mark the individual's name down the right hand side of the topmost (i.e. most recent)

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piece of correspondence. (As we keep our responses attached to the letters, it is usually a carbon of a letter from the NFE Center that is on top.) An example of the top letter in a person's file follows:

Parham, Michael M.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION INFORMATION CENTER
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION • 237 ERICKSON HALL
EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN 48824 USA
(517) 353-5237

MSU International Year 1981-1982

13 May 1984

Mr. Michael M. Parham
World Education, Inc.
5180 Roosevelt Ave.
Paris 70096, FRANCE

Dear Mr. Parham:

Thank you very much for you communication of 27 February and for sending us a copy of:

- Non-Formal Education in Asia and the Pacific: A Selected Annotated Bibliography prepared by Karen L. Harris

In the spirit of exchange, we are pleased to send to you, under separate cover, the following NFE publication:

- Annotated Bibliography #10, Non-Formal Education and Agriculture: A Selected Annotated Bibliography prepared by Karen Collamore Sullivan and the staff of the Non-Formal Education Information Center

If there is any way the Non-Formal Education Information Center may be of assistance to you please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Karen Collamore Sullivan for
Mary Joy Pigozzi, Director
NFE Information Center

KCS/jml

Separate Cover: AB#10

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In some cases, the collection of letters between a person and the Center may become large enough to warrant its own manila folder. (This is usually the case when interactions have been both frequent and over a fairly extensive period of time.) In such cases a manila folder is prepared, this time with the individual's name on the label, rather than an alphabetical range. These folders are filed alphabetically with the other manila folders. An example appears below. (See diagram on page 44.)

Because many development organizations have more than one office (for example, UNICEF often has representatives in several locations in many countries), the NFE Center has found it necessary to have a cross-referencing system in its correspondence files. The system is very simple. A cross-reference sheet which lists the organization's name on the left hand side of the paper is placed in alphabetical order in the correspondence files. A list on the right hand side of the sheet of paper contains the names of various

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individuals with the agency who are also in contact with the NFE Center. For identification purposes cross reference sheets are made up on colored paper. (Correspondence is on white sheets of paper.)

An example of a cross-reference sheet from our files appears immediately below.

Ohio State University	See: Alswede, Karen Bagge, Sylvia Simms, Lisa

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As a final note on filing, our experience suggests that it is important to maintain orderly files and to return materials to their rightful place in the filing system as soon as possible. In both cases, attention to these details greatly facilitates accuracy and a speedy response to mail requests while decreasing the amount of time spend on searching for files that are not in place.

B. MAILING LISTS

If an organization is to stay in touch with people through correspondence it is essential that there be an up-to-date and easily accessible list of those people's addresses. The development of a mailing list is an easy and commonly-used way to maintain a list of current addresses. Each entry on a mailing list contains an individual's/organization's name and the full address.

A simple mailing list serves a single purpose. For example, a list might contain the names and addresses of individuals who receive notification of departmental meetings or the names and addresses of people who receive a particular newsletter. A more complex mailing list might serve several purposes. If only a selected group of people from within the list are to receive a particular kind of correspondence, then it might be necessary to code the entries according to the specific purpose for which they are included on the list.

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Experience has shown that as soon as there are more than a very small number of entries on a mailing list it is usually advantageous to organize the entries in some way. A very common organizational structure is to maintain entries in alphabetical order by the last name. Other ways might be by department, organization, or country.

At this time, rather than have one complicated mailing list, the NFE Center has several simpler ones. The largest and most complex is the mailing list for The NFE Exchange. This mailing list is complex because it serves different purposes. First and foremost, it contains the names and addresses of individuals and organizations who receive an issue of The NFE Exchange each time it is published. Second, the list contains a record of when address changes were made and what other NFE Center publications were sent to the person and on which date.

This mailing list is maintained manually (rather than on a computer) and entries are kept on separate cards so that it is easy to add, remove, or alter entries as necessary. The list consists of two sets of identical cards. There are two primary reasons for having two sets:

- each serves as a cross reference to the other
- each set serves different purposes

As has been noted earlier, when the Center prepares an entry for The NFE Exchange mailing list two identical cards are prepared. One card is filed alphabetically by the last name of the individual (or by the organization name) and the second card is filed by country (and alphabetically within each country). These cards and

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files are known as "alpha" and "country" respectively. The diagram on the following page gives an example of these cards.

It is easy to see that the two cards illustrated are not quite identical, however! This difference relates to different purposes served by the periodical's mailing list. The alpha card is used frequently. As we noted earlier, whenever the Center receives correspondence from a regular recipient of The NFE Exchange the card is attached to the inquiry along with any previous correspondence before the inquiry is passed on to the center staff member who will prepare a response. This informs the staff member as to whether the correspondent is already familiar with The NFE Exchange or not. The alpha card also contains a listing of other publications that have been sent by the Center. This basic information is essential if the Center is to be responsive to inquiries without wasting resources by sending duplicate materials.

The country cards are used for running address labels for mailing The NFE Exchange. When the periodical is mailed the post office prefers that the envelopes be sorted by destination. As the mailing list is fairly large (up to 5,000 entries) and the periodical is sent to 145 countries it is useful to have the labels pre-sorted--having the addresses organized on the list by country makes this possible.

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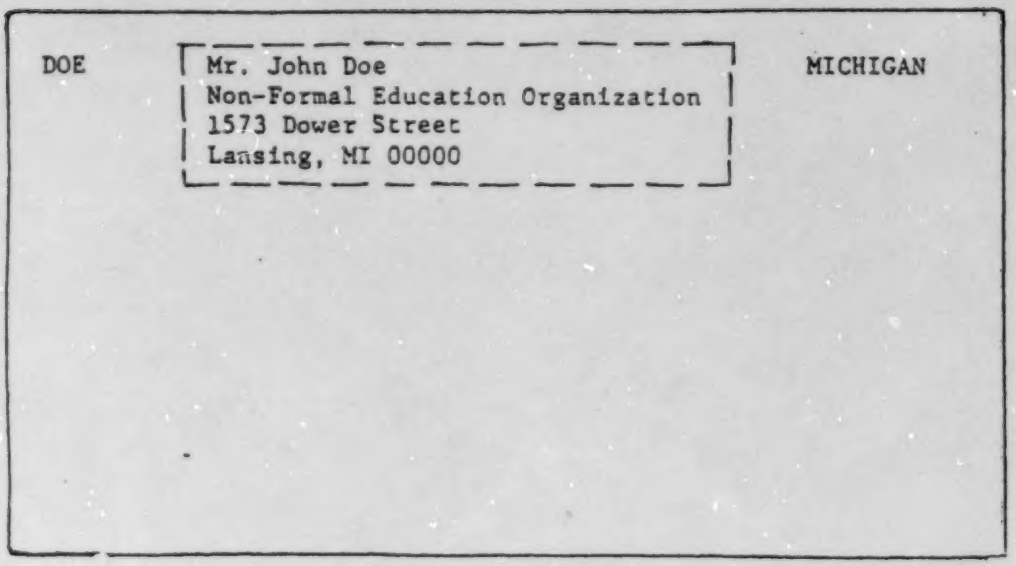
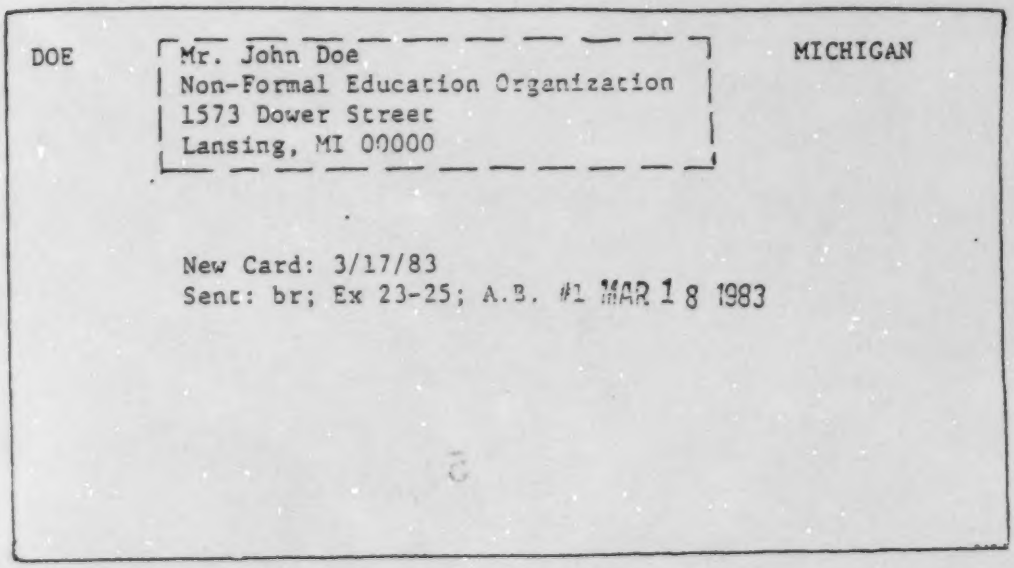
COUNTRY CARD



ALPHA CARD



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The NFE Center also maintains several other smaller mailing lists. For example, there is a list of individuals who have requested a copy of each Annotated Bibliography the Center prepares. There are similar lists for Occasional Papers and for all other Center publications, including research reports.

C. PROCESSING INCOMING MAIL

The high volume of mail received by the NFE Center demands an efficient system for monitoring it if the Center is to answer inquiries quickly without losing pieces of correspondence. Over the years Center staff have developed simple methods for recording monitoring, and tracking incoming correspondence, and for collecting pertinent data.

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i. Correspondence Log

Several years ago the Center developed a correspondence log. The log consists of separate sheets of paper with spaces in which one can record information relating to individual pieces of correspondence. On the next page is an example of an empty log sheet.

Each NFE Center log sheet allows information to be collected on eight (8) pieces of correspondence. Several kinds of information are collected on each piece of correspondence. The categories for these are given across the top of the log sheet. The following is recorded on the log sheet:

- *Date* - this refers to the date the NFE Center receives a piece of correspondence
- *Name, Title* - the name and title of the person contacting the Center. (In a few cases, this might be blank.)
- *Organization - Name/Country/Geographic Area/Type/In/New.* This information identifies the geographic location (by country and region) of the organization, the type or kind of organization (for example, is it a business, an academic institution, or part of a government?), and whether the person is in the NFE Network (that is, has the person already been in contact with the NFE Center) or a new correspondent.
- *Ans'd by* - this identifies which staff member is responsible for drafting a response
- *Draft* - the date that a response is drafted is entered into this column
- *Date Typed or Acknowledged* - usually, this date varies slightly from the date a response is drafted

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HFE INFORMATION CENTER CORRESPONDENCE LOG

PAGE _____

DATE	NAME TITLE	ORGANIZATION/NAME COUNTRY/GEO AREA	TYPE IN/NEW	ANS'D BY	DRAFT	DATE TYPED OR ACK'D	TYPE OF REQ.	COMMENTS/INTEREST AREA	
		/	—						
		/	—						
		/	—						
		/	—						
		/	—						
		/	—						
		/	—						
		/	—	53					

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- *Type of Request* - This allows the Center staff to note particular kinds of requests that come to the Center. A detailed discussion of each kind of request is contained in Part II. The type of request is recorded by using a code. The code currently used by the NFE Center is as follows:

Code	Type of Request
E	Extend services/mailing list for The NFE Exchange
P	Publications
TSPR	Topical search for printed resources
TSNC	Topical search to locate NFE centers
IIE	Include item in The NFE Exchange
ETP	Education and Training Program

- *Comments/Interest Area* - this allows the Center to expand on the information contained in the coded "type of request" in the previous column. Here the Center records the subject areas of a request (for example, appropriate health technology or training in participatory methods for women cooperative members), The NFE Center publications requested, and other information of interest. NFE Center publications are recorded by using the following code.

Code	Type of Publication
AB#	Annotated Bibliography # __
OP#	Occasional Paper # __
EX#	The NFE Exchange, issue __
P#	NFE Center Brochure Publication # __
MAN#	Manual # __

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- *the final column* - allows the NFE Center to keep track of the number and subject areas of documents donated. The table on the next page lists the topic headings most frequently used.

The log sheets the Center uses allow for easy, accurate, and regular data gathering on incoming mail. These sheets have already been adapted by several organizations so as to meet their own, slightly different record keeping needs.

ii. Mail Through the System

Incoming mail is always opened on the day it is received. It is immediately dated and the first three columns of a log sheet completed by the person opening the mail. Then, any previous correspondence from the correspondence files and the alpha card from the mailing list of The NFE Exchange (if either or both exist) are attached to the appropriate piece of incoming mail. Two important procedures related to incoming documents also occur at this time. First all documents sent to the NFE Center (with the exception of periodicals that come regularly) receive labels indentifying the name and address of the person who gave the publication. This means that even though the publication becomes physically separated from the related correspondence (publications are later catalogued and become part of the NFE Library collection) it is easy to find letters that relate directly to particular materials. Second, acknowledgement cards are typed and attached to the publications so that

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Topic Headings Used for Documents Received at the NFE Center:

Adults
Agriculture
Appropriate Technology
Children
Communication
Community Development
Cooperatives
Cost Effectiveness
Credit Unions
Curriculum Development
Development-General
Evaluation
Family Planning
French
Handicappers
Health
Home Economics
Income Generation
Industrial/Vocational
Information Services
Integrated Development
Literacy/Basic Education
Management (Business)
Needs Assessment
Non-Formal Education Theory
Nutrition
Out-of-School Youth
Participation
Project Management/Administration
Project Planning
Project Proposals and Funding
Small Business
Training
Urban
Women

Africa
American Indian
Asia
Europe
Latin America
Middle East
North America
Worldwide

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they can be signed.

Log sheets and the accompanying mail (including publications) are given to the staff member responsible for drafting responses to inquiries. (There are some exceptions, however. Priority letters may go directly to the Director.) The person responsible for answering the mail makes decisions regarding the kind of response each piece of incoming mail should receive following the guidelines and procedures described in Part II of this manual. Incoming letters usually receive written responses. In some cases the Center is able to respond using the standarized paragraphs it has developed (though this depends on the nature of the inquiry). These paragraphs are described in the section immediately following. When it is appropriate to only send an acknowledgement card, the card is proofed carefully and signed (as described earlier, acknowledgement cards are prepared early in the mail-response process).

The person answering the mail is responsible for completing all the remaining columns on the log sheet except the one identifying when the letter was typed. The columns are completed (using the codes described above, when appropriate) as each piece of mail is handled. Regular periodicals are tallied at the bottom of the log sheet. The following page contains an example of a completed log sheet.

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NFE INFORMATION OFFICER CORRESPONDENCE LOG

PAGE ____

DATE	NAME TITLE	ORGANIZATION/NAME COUNTRY/GEO AREA	TYPE IN/REV.	ANS'D BY	DRAFT	DATE TYPED OR ACK'D	TYPE OF REQ.	COMMENTS/INTEREST AREA	
19 Sept	Reiss, Mark J.	Leyte Cooperative Rural Bank, Inc. PHILIPPINES / ASIA	— —	KCS	20 Sept		E		
19 Sept	Waile, Mrs. Sherman	Rabbani Rural Health Project INDIA / ASIA	— —	KCS	20 Sept		TSPR	Health for Village women	
A Sept	Lee, Christina	Peace Corps PHILIPPINES/ASIA	— —	KCS	20 Sept.		P	AB #1 WID Ex #22-25	
19 Sept	Stroetmann, U.	Institute of Adult Education W GERMANY/ EUROPE	— —	KCS	20 Sept.		ES 3		
19 Sept.	Flanigan, Sheila	NEW YORK / U. A.	— —	KCS	20 Sept		TSNC		
19 Sept	Rugano, Boas	Ministry of Education and Culture ZIMBABWE / AFRICA	— —	KCS	20 Sept		ETP	ref. to. T. Ward D Nickerson	
19 Sept	Horne, Michael P. and Malone, Catherine	SOLOMON IS / ASIA	— —	KCS	20 Sept			leadership training	1
19 Sept	Fell, Arthur M.	OECD FRANCE / EUROPE	— —	KCS	20 Sept		IIE		

IIII IIII IIII IIII II

Log sheets along with the related publications, and letters and their drafts are then passed on to the Director. This serves two purposes. In this way the Director is always aware of all written contacts that the Center has and is also able to serve as a second person to review the response and the kinds of resources that are being sent or recommended to the writer. As a general rule, no longer than one week passes between receipt of a letter and completion of a response.

After correspondence drafts are reviewed by the Director, responses are typed by the Center Secretary.

iii. Correspondence Paragraphs

The correspondence paragraphs are a set of standardized paragraphs developed by the NFE Center which are designed to respond to the most frequently received types of requests. Each of these paragraphs has been given a number and a descriptive heading indicating the kind of request it applies to (such as, response to request to be placed on mailing list, response to request for NFEIC publication, change of address, etc.). The staff members who are responsible for correspondence have a copy of the set of paragraphs which they use when drafting responses to requests.

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For example, many people write asking to be placed on the mailing list for the Center's newsletter, The NFE Exchange. In general, we respond to such requests by offering our services, sending one or several issues of our newsletter (depending on the interests expressed in the letter), explaining our exchange principle, and inviting the writer to participate in an exchange of information with us. All of this information is included in several standardized paragraphs which can be combined to form a response to such a request. Where appropriate, blank spaces are left in the standard paragraphs so that details specific to a particular request can be filled in (for instance, reference to the date of the writer's letter, or the issue numbers of the newsletter being sent).

Thus, staff members responding to such a request need only select the appropriate paragraphs and indicate them on the draft by writing the number of each paragraph in the sequence in which they are to appear in the typed letter. In Part II of this manual we discussed in more detail the procedures followed and decisions made in the process of drafting responses to inquiries received by the Center. Using the previous example of a request to be placed on the mailing list, the following diagrams illustrate how the paragraphs are used and arranged on the draft, and how they are "translated" into the actual letter.

DRAFT

Date

Dear ——

TP 1) ... letter of 12 March ...
... (nos. 23 and 25) ...

TP20a) ...

TP31a) ...

Sincerely,
KCS for MJP

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

NON FORMAL EDUCATION INFORMATION CENTER
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION • 237 ERICKSON HALL
EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN 48824, USA
(517) 355 5522

MSU International Year 1981 - 1982

12 May 1984

Mr. John Doe
Non-Formal Education Organization
1573 Dover Street
Lansing, MI 00000

Dear Mr. Doe:

In response to your letter of 12 March, we are pleased to offer you the services of the Non-Formal Education Information Center as described in the enclosed brochure. We are sending, under separate cover, copies of several recent issues (nos. 23 and 25) of The NFE Exchange newsletter, and have placed your name on the mailing list to receive future issues. These are exchange publications intended primarily for development planners and practitioners working with the world's poor majority, and available without cost through a contract with the Agency for International Development.

We invite you to place in our NFE Library any reports, surveys or descriptions of out-of-school education activities in which you or your colleagues may be engaged. We would, in turn, make these materials known to development planners and practitioners around the world who inquire about topically related resources.

If there is any way the Non-Formal Education Information Center may be of further assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Karen Collamore for
Mary Joy Pigozzi, Director
NFE Information Center

KSC:jml

Separate cover: Ex #23,25

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It should be noted that the set of paragraphs used by the Center were not designed all at once. Rather, they developed over time as a response to several kinds of frequently received requests for information and resources. Furthermore, as the nature of requests change so do the paragraphs, and periodically we have found it useful to revise them, eliminate some, and add new ones.

The advantages of having such a set of standardized paragraphs are several. The paragraphs provide a consistency to the way in which general inquiries are dealt with so that if several staff members are involved in answering the mail the same stylistic "tone" will be maintained. It also ensures that details of the Center's policies regarding, for instance, extension of services, sending publications, and describing our exchange principle, are not left out. Because the Center receives 80-100 letters a week, and because each must be responded to individually, these paragraphs allow general requests to be handled quickly and promptly, thus enabling staff to spend time researching the more specialized requests that come in (see Part II of this manual).

The NFE Center has the added advantage of having the entire set of paragraphs put into the memory system of an electronic memory typewriter, so that all the typist has to do is type in the code numbers of the paragraphs listed on the draft and any specific details inserted into the paragraphs. However, even without such a

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machine a set of standardized paragraphs is extremely useful for handling a large volume of inquiries quickly and efficiently.

iv. Typing and Proofing

Accurate typing and careful proofing are important steps in the mail process. Once letter drafts are completed they are typed by the Secretary. In many ways this part of the process is much more complicated than it originally seems. In addition to ensuring that the response to be sent out is accurate and neat a number of other tasks are involved. The Secretary is responsible for:

- ensuring correct numbers of carbon copies are typed
- proofing each letter and correcting any errors
- noting the typing date on the log
- typing correspondent's address on envelope
- including brochures, when appropriate
- including enclosures, when appropriate
- photocopying letter for NFE Center files if carbon copy is difficult to read
- typing mailing list card (s) if necessary
- listing separate cover materials to be sent on the letter. as well as on the alpha card (if the person is on The NFE Exchange mailing list)
- preparing and attaching separate cover mailing label(s)

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Once the necessary activities listed above have been completed the log sheets are filed and the correspondence (with cards, labels, envelopes, etc.) is returned to the appropriate staff member for signature.

In addition to signing the letter the staff member is responsible for double-checking the response and, particularly, for proofreading. Our experience has shown that it is especially important to:

- check individuals names and titles carefully
- check the name of the organization as listed by the Center against the organization's letterhead
- read numbers (street numbers, box numbers, postal codes) digit by digit
- read the letter and address to ensure that there are no typographical errors
- ensure that the address is correct on all items (i.e., letter, mailing cards, envelope, and labels)
- check that the correct number of carbon copies are attached

Once all these steps have been completed and the letter has been signed, it is ready to be mailed.

D. RECORD KEEPING AND MAILING

Upon receipt of signed letters the Secretary is responsible for two general tasks: record keeping and mailing. Record keeping

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is important because it ensures that the Center's files are up-to-date and it allows us to keep track of how many of each Center publication have been sent out.

Record keeping includes:

- noting which publications have been sent out
- stamping the alpha card with the date that separate cover materials were sent
- stamping the file copy of the letter with the date that separate cover materials were sent
- stapling the correspondence together to prepare it for filing
- turning the top page of correspondence so the right side is at the top and writing the last name of the person addressed in the correspondence so that the correspondence may be filed.

Mailing includes:

- mailing letter with enclosures
- mailing carbon copies where appropriate
- preparing and mailing separate cover materials

A final step involves returning all file copies to the correspondence files.

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IV. OBSERVATIONS

Throughout this manual we have described the system by which the Non-Formal Education Information Center maintains an NFE network through correspondence. We began by outlining the letter answering services of the Center, the types of requests received, and we explained procedures followed by Center staff in responding to these requests. We have also set forth details on how the NFE Center's correspondence system is organized and managed in an effort to provide practical suggestions to guide others who may be involved in building and maintaining a similar network as well as those who may be interested in starting one. In this section we highlight several aspects of the NFE Center's correspondence networking style that we consider key to the effective maintenance of the international NFE network.

The exchange principle, in which individuals share with the NFE Center reports, descriptions, and assessments of their own work in non-formal education in exchange for the Center's services and publications is a particularly important aspect of providing information assistance to an international audience, many of whom are working with very limited financial resources. Clearly, the Center's exchange policy provides a form of access to information resources which if dependent upon financial payment would likely not exist for many of the NFE and development practitioners working in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. That this alternative means of "payment" through an exchange arrangement is valued by our colleagues working worldwide is consist-

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ently demonstrated by their comments and by their generous contributions to the NFE resource collection. In this sense the NFE Center benefits as well from this exchange policy. The unique character of the Center's information base is derived from and maintained by the publications, periodicals, reports, and other print contributions made to the Center's resource collection.

Providing services and publications to persons on an exchange basis encourages direct participation of network partners and adds a dynamic quality to the interaction between the Center and individuals in the network, and among network participants themselves. Rather than merely disseminating information in a uni-directional manner, the Center acts to facilitate this interaction within the network. The Center's publications and referral services provide primary avenues for enabling persons to learn of and contact others with similar interests.

All requests for information assistance receive a personalized letter in response. The handling of inquiries on an individual basis enables Center staff to consider each request in terms of specific needs expressed by those who write to us and in terms of the "context" of the writer. We have discussed the importance of context in Part II. We would add here that sensitivity to contextual details that may be indicated in the letters leads to tailor-made responses which will be more appropriate and useful to the individuals making the requests. In addition, responding individually to each request enables the Center to maintain a colleagial rapport with network participants.

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The NFE Center's internal correspondence system is designed to sustain the personalized rapport with network participants. While we recognize that it is time-consuming to maintain the correspondence files in the manner we have described, such a filing system provides a record and an historical summary of any communication we may have had with an individual or organization in the past. In doing so, this system assists in the assessment process for any current request we might receive. Not only does this enchance the personalized quality of our responses to inquiries, it also ensures that the information, reference listings, or publications we might send are current and not a duplication of an earlier request.

Related to this is the emphasis the Center places on accuracy in every aspect of the correspondence system, from logging in each letter and making sure that correspondence is filed properly, to selecting appropriate materials in response to a request, as well as the typing and proof-reading of every response that the Center mails out. Such attention to detail keeps the system organized and operating smoothly on a day to day basis, while also adding to the overall quality of the Center's work.

As we mentioned earlier, the Center's correspondence system operates on a one-week turnover for all incoming mail. In other words, when a request comes into the Center a response will be drafted, typed, and mailed out within seven working days. This means that all of the initial steps, such as logging the letters in, checking the files for previous correspondence for each letter, assessing the

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content of each request, and deciding on a response, must all fall within the seven day time-frame as well. The Center considers the one-week turnover policy for correspondence essential to maintaining an active dialogue with participants in the NFE network. Equally important, however, is the built in time factor in long distance communication through the mails. The time it takes for a letter to arrive at the Center from Africa, or Asia, for example, and the time it takes for our response to reach its destination means that there is already a delay, sometimes amounting to several weeks, while the letters are "in transit". The Center's commitment to responding to all letters within a week of receipt is an attempt to partially offset these delays and make sure that individuals in need of information receive assistance as promptly as possible.